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Cover: Nile Crocodile *Crocodylus niloticus* regulating body temperature on a warm day. Digital art on Procreate by © Aakanksha Komanduri.



A photographic record of the Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Mammalia: Pholidota: Manidae) from Pakyong District, Sikkim, India

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Pangolins, commonly known as “scaly anteaters”, derive their name from the Malayan phrase *pengguling*, meaning “rolling ball”, as they curl into a tight ball when threatened (Atkins 2004). They are nocturnal, elusive, solitary, non-aggressive, insectivorous mammals adapted for burrowing (Gaubert 2011). Globally, eight pangolin species are recognised, four in Africa and four in Asia. Currently, all species are listed as threatened on the IUCN Red List (IUCN 2022).

The Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* Linnaeus, 1758 is distributed across southern and southeastern Asia, including Nepal, Bhutan, northern India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Hainan, and Taiwan (Challender et al. 2019). In India, the species has been reported from several northeastern states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, and Assam (Zoological Survey of India 2002; Srinivasulu & Srinivasulu 2012), with additional sightings from northern West Bengal and Sikkim (Misra & Hanfee 2000). During faunal assessments conducted in the protected areas of Sikkim by the Forest Department, the

Chinese Pangolin was not recorded (Lepcha et al. 2017), despite earlier studies documenting its occurrence in the state (Avasthe & Jha 1999; Sathyakumar et al. 2011b). Later, Naulak & Pradhan (2020) included the species in a checklist of mammals from the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya landscape, indicating its continued presence in both regions. Recently, the occurrence of this species has been confirmed through camera trapping and local informant interviews as part of an environmental impact assessment in Sikkim, India (ADB 2026).

The species is currently listed as ‘Critically Endangered’ on the IUCN Red List due to rapid population declines caused by illegal trade, habitat loss, and fragmentation (Challender et al. 2019). In India, *M. pentadactyla* is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection (Amendment) Act, 2022 and is listed under CITES Appendix I, providing the highest level of legal protection, making hunting and trade a punishable offense. Despite all these efforts, pangolins remain the most trafficked animal globally, largely driven by the illegal demand for their meat and scales (Aditya et al.

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2021).

The present observation was recorded from Barapathing Village, Pakyong District, Sikkim, India (27.248° N, 88.697° E), at an elevation ranging from 1,150–1,700 m. The landscape encompasses subtropical to temperate broad-leaved forests combined with agricultural land and human settlements. In recent years, the region has experienced increased anthropogenic pressure due to road construction and upgradation, particularly associated with National Highway 717B.

On the evening of 31 March 2024, a local resident observed an unfamiliar animal wandering within their backyard at Barapathing, apparently lost or in search of food. The resident, unfamiliar with the species, initially attempted to drive the animal away but, the animal did not flee. Despite pangolins being characteristically shy and elusive (Martin et al. 2024), this individual showcased passive behaviour, possibly indicating tolerance to human-dominated landscapes.

The animal was temporarily sheltered inside a room, and the Barapathing Territorial Range, Forest & Environment Department, was contacted for rescue. On the following day, range personnel successfully rescued the individual and rehabilitated it into a downstream subtropical forest. The animal was identified as an adult Chinese Pangolin, *Manis pentadactyla*, based on distinct morphological characteristics, such as overlapping keratinous scales, an elongated snout, and robust body form (Image 1 & 2).

Photographs obtained during the rescue and rehabilitation process (Images 1 & 2) confirm the

presence of *M. pentadactyla* from Barapathing, Pakyong District, Sikkim, India. Locally, the species is known as “Saalak” in the Nepali language in the region. According to local residents, the species had never previously been observed in so close proximity to human habitation in the area.

Later, the species identity *Manis pentadactyla* was confirmed by Dr. Vikram Aditya, principal scientist and faculty, Centre for Wildlife Studies, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India (Member of IUCN SSC Pangolin Specialist Group) through photographs and description.

Habitat loss and fragmentation arising from deforestation, forest fires, and road development exert considerable threats to pangolins throughout their range (Suwal et al. 2020). Sikkim has recorded one of the highest decadal growth rates of national highways in India (NEDFi 2024), and the upgradation of roads near Barapathing Village may have contributed to habitat disruption, increasing human-wildlife encounters.

Behavioural adaptation may allow temporary persistence in altered landscapes (Wong & Candolin 2014), such changes often increase susceptibility to illegal hunting, stress, and population decline. Illegal hunting and transboundary trafficking are an escalating threat to Chinese Pangolins in Sikkim and nearby states. A report by The Statesman (2021) documented the seizure of a dead pangolin near the Bengal-Sikkim border, where five individuals from Sikkim were arrested while allegedly attempting to smuggle the animal to Bhutan. The mammal was reportedly killed in a wildlife sanctuary in Sikkim, and the report further indicated



Image 1. Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* inside the home until the arrival of the rescue unit of Barapathing Territorial Range. © Sangita Ruchal.



Image 2. Chinese Pangolin after being rehabilitated into the forest by the Barapathing Territorial Range. © Prem Kumar Chettri.

possible links with an international wildlife trafficking network operating across the eastern Himalayan region. Therefore, there is a need for baseline ecological data on *M. pentadactyla* in Sikkim for conservation planning. This short communication provides the photographic and additional record of the Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* from Barapathing, Pakyong District, Sikkim, India. It highlights the escalating conservation challenges and threats linked to development-related habitat fragmentation, illegal hunting and transboundary trafficking. This record serves as a catalyst for focused field surveys, habitat connectivity interventions and community-based awareness programmes to reduce anthropogenic pressure and support the long-term survival of this Critically Endangered species in Sikkim, India.

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